

THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE AND HOME MAGAZINE.

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Our Maritime Letter.

Statists and economists are just now estimating the damage done to the crop of 1906 by insects, fungi and weeds. At best, the calculation can only be approximate. But even the casual observer easily realizes the immense toll which these pests impose on the husbandry of the country annually; and if he be really a patriot who makes two blades of grass where but one grew before, all will doubtless be ready to cover with admiration him who studies and works to secure the growing crops against ravages which inflict so great a tax on agricultural effort everywhere. The many millions of dollars which noxious weeds, insect pests and fungus diseases filch from the farmers of the land yearly would easily run, twice over, the Government of the country, and many are just awakening to a realization of its enormous cost in late years. Then, after robbing the soil of its plant food which should mature abundant crops, the presence of some of these weeds, at least, is a menace to the lives of the domestic animals which we must fodder over winter. If the farmer only realized the damage sustainable from their presence all round, how readily would he not exert himself to eradicate them when they first appear and when they are so easily eradicated.

All Maritime Canada is interested in the experiments which the General Government, under Dr. Rutherford, Veterinary Director-General, and Dr. Pethick, Superintendent, is making in Antigonish County, N. S., to fasten what is known as the "Pictou Cattle Disease" upon the ragwort, a plant of the Senecio family, which was introduced into these Provinces from the British Isles, where it early created a suspicion on account of a mysteri-

ous cattle disease, but later was received back into honor by botanists generally.

It was introduced into Nova Scotia in the early fifties. Here, we discovered it, on coming west, at Greenmount, in 1887, and, enquiring about its origin, found that it was brought hither by a man named Ryan, who emptied the bed-tick on which he slept on the passage out from Ireland, on the roadside, and thus sowed the seeds which have since pretty well infested the Province. It is found flourishing east of Souris, too, and could have been easily imported there from Pictou. So far we have not noticed it in New Brunswick, although it has doubtless secured a footing there, too. It is surely time to fight it unflinchingly. With his report, Dr. Pethick prints a good map of the infected area of Nova Scotia; as well might he include the parts of the other Provinces where Baughlan is found. By this map we see that Pictou County, Antigonish County, and a coast fringe in contiguous parts of Guysborough and Colchester, are completely overrun. The start was made, as we have said, from the ballast from a Scottish ship thrown upon Pictou Landing.

As agriculture had not adopted any sort of regular rotation in the Pictou district in these early days, ragwort, locally called "Stinking Willie," got quickly into the grass lands and became mixed at harvest with the dry hay generally. A new disease among the cattle followed. Nobody knew what caused it at first, or what it really was, but the cattle sickened and died in a



Ragwort.

comparatively short time. There were those who blamed the ragwort, because the disease was always in the area infested by this plant. Others pooh-hoed the very idea. In England, as we have said, a little suspicion attached to it, but as the farming methods improved, the dangers from contaminated hay lessened, and little disease being in evidence, the suspicion was quickly removed. Botanists hate to have charges laid at the door of their pet plants which cannot be fully proven, so they stood by the old, white-headed Jacobite with splendid pertinacity.

Dr. Fletcher, our own eminent botanist, writing us about it in 1887, and enquiring about the local name—for here it is known altogether as Baughlan, the Irish for yellow-weed—said that it was blamed long ago in England for producing a mysterious cattle disease, but the charge was not at all sustained. Backed by such authority, we confess to a degree of wilfulness in resisting the imputations levelled at the Baughlan from a pathological point of view, although the records are there to prove that we wrote the Island press, and through it exhorted the farming community to destroy it root and branch, by mowing and spudding, as it was a rank feeder and an unsightly thing about the stading. But it got into the waste places, and spread afar. The farmer is not too easily moved, either, sad to say.

Well, even here we have had mysterious deaths among the cattle. The Government vet. has been called in, and the infected animals were promptly slaughtered and as promptly paid for by the Department. Still, we were inclined to think that there was little accurate information in the possession of those gentlemen, and a well-developed propensity to gather in the \$25 per day vouchsafed by the Crown. We said something to this effect publicly, and may now have to make whatever they deem necessary to satisfy every requirement of an amende honorable.

The Blue Book just published by Dr. Pethick, under direction of Dr. Rutherford, as to those experiments with the Pictou Cattle Disease, is, to our mind, fairly conclusive. It proves beyond doubt, that all the cattle to which dried ragwort, either in its purity or mixed with some other aliment, was fed, died ultimately with hepatic cirrhosis—a liver complaint like unto "Gin Liver" in man. Unless we impugn the veracity of the report, we cannot resist its conclusions, and we are not inclined at all to the former course, but think, on the contrary, that the Government, Dr. Rutherford and Dr. Pethick are to be commended, in the highest, for settling this vexed question forever. To Maritime Canada it is a vital matter; it may not be so to other parts of the Dominion, although, if not Senecio Jacobea, other plants of the same family grow nearly everywhere, and perhaps are responsible, when mixed with the fodder, for some of the unaccountable deaths in the herds, which are ever occurring. May it not have happened that even the beautiful Golden-rod, a great irritant in hay fever, and a close parent to ragwort, has some of this disease to its account? In any case, the wisest may well be on his guard.

Dr. Pethick made four distinct test cases with it, covering three years, at Cloverdale, where the Government purchased an infected farm and herd and fed it, and the other animals secured, on all sorts of rations, with dry Baughlan included, only to see every animal ultimately die of the disease. Cows fed in the same stable on clean hay or straw, thrived. They proved, too, there what was not previously known—the non-contagiousness of the disease. Ingestion, into the stomach, of the dried weed was always fatal, except in the case of sheep, with which, however, a sufficiently exhaustive test was not made. Sheep, too, were shown to be an excellent means of ridding the pastures of it, as indeed they are of all bad weeds. Cattle won't eat it green-growing at all. These specialists do not believe that horses are immune, either, although their experimentation on this point is not complete. Horses have died mysteriously about here, on infested farms, in the same way as cows. To a special phase of the study we may revert later.

And what is the lesson from all this? Anyone with ragwort, whether known as "Stinking Willie," or "Baughlan," on the premises, should not sleep before it is eradicated; otherwise, let him make no complaint when his cattle succumb to the disease. By no means should it be permitted to get into the hay. If in the fields, adopt a short rotation at once. Where only appearing, it is easily subdued by a couple of cuttings, thus preventing seeding. Although it is a short-lived perennial, this usage will effectually kill it in two years. If only a few plants show themselves, be careful to spud it out carefully. And get rid of all weeds early on general principles.

A. E. BURKE.

Let the wife and mother of the house take a breathing spell at noon, as soon as the men get away to work after dinner. An hour's nap, or a couple of hours in a shady nook or in a hammock under a tree, or on a well-shaded veranda, will do considerable towards the preservation of good health, good looks and good temper.

The Knife is a Dandy.

As I sent to you for one of your knives some time ago, I wish to express my sincere thanks to you for sending me such a valuable knife. I know what I talk about, as I had one of them for two years, and was very sorry to lose the same.

Huron Co., Ont.

JOHN ELDER.